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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0570
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 001085

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DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: FORMER PRIME MINISTER HEADS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 1063 AND PREVIOUS
B) ANTANANARIVO 715

11. (U) As expected, former Prime Minister and ruling "Tiako-i-Madagasikara" (TIM) party member Jacques Sylla was unanimously elected President of Madagascar's National Assembly October 23 at the body's opening session. The only candidate, Sylla was approved by all 124 deputies present, with the exception of one blank ballot. Citing the need to align legislation with the new constitution for the ultimate realization of the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), his inaugural speech called for unity between the three branches of government. Saying, "There is much work to do," he encouraged his colleagues to show a more positive image of the National Assembly in order to regain the people's trust.

12. (SBU) A widely respected politician, Sylla is known as "the tranquil force" for his quiet leadership style. A tall, light-skinned man of mixed Franco-Malagasy origin, he is also called "Vazaha Be" - or "big foreigner." He was considered effective during his tenure as Prime Minister, largely for his positive working relationship with the diametrically opposed President Ravalomanana (REF B). On the one hand, Sylla's quiet demeanor was said to have a calming effect on the more impulsive President, however some observers noted he stayed too quiet at times. For example, he stayed largely silent when the President fired him as Prime Minister in January.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: Post anticipates a smooth working relationship between the National Assembly and the Executive Branch. Sylla is firmly on board with the recent constitutional changes and the MAP and is in good standing with the President. Also, many of the independents who won seats in the National Assembly elections have announced they will align with the ruling party. Observers hope Sylla's past experience as Prime Minister and background as a lawyer will bring greater knowledge, efficiency, and leadership to the Presidency of the National Assembly. END COMMENT.

NEUBERT